

Statement in Support of New Legislation for Stem Cell Research
James F. Eliason, Ph.D., Vice President External Development, Asterand
Tel: 313 263-0953
Email: jeliason@asterand.com

Research into new treatments for disease is truly an international effort. If Michigan is to compete for a piece of the global life science industry, we have to recognize the reality of this highly competitive world. As the title of Thomas Friedman's best selling book puts it, "The World is Flat". Companies will carry out their research in states or countries where the resources and environment give them the most encouragement. If there are restrictions in one place, there are plenty of alternative locations that are actively recruiting to build the industry.

Asterand provides an example of both the opportunity to create jobs in the state and the dangers of losing them overseas.

We were founded in Michigan 7 years ago to provide core resources to help pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies find new treatments for diseases. We operate a world-wide network of hospitals and clinics that supply ethically collected human tissue samples and data.

We have built a world bank of genetic information and increasingly clients are asking us to carry out research on their behalf. Our clients are also global, located in North America, Europe and Asia.

We chose Michigan as a place to grow our business because of the declared intention of the state to provide a supportive environment for life sciences. This included financial incentives and interaction with the academic research community. We have prospered with support from MEDC, state and local political leaders, Wayne State University, the University of Michigan, the Detroit Medical Center and others.

After six years of rapid growth, we are now a public company with almost 100 employees and we have labs in Europe as well as at our headquarters here in Detroit. It is entirely possible that as we grow, we will be asked to do work involving embryonic stem cells.

As things now stand, we would be obliged to do that work at our labs in England or to set up labs elsewhere in the world, although we have the expertise here. This, of course, would take jobs away from Michigan.

There are ethical considerations involved with everything Asterand does with human tissue and we pride ourselves in operating to the highest ethical standards. We firmly believe that education of the citizens of Michigan is the best way to provide a balanced ethical approach for embryonic stem cell research.

OncoMed is a well know example of a researcher and his company that moved from Michigan to the more supportive environment of California. We can never know if companies who might have set up business here didn't because of the legal restrictions just as we will never know how many researchers have turned down positions at our universities for similar reasons.